

The date December 7th has not been heard quite the same in the last 80 years, because of one of the most tragic events in our country's history, when over two thousand American soldiers were killed while serving on a naval base in the peaceful surroundings of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In order to best honor those lives lost, within two decades, a memorial was constructed listing the names of the thousands, not to mention landmarks in the middle of the water standing over where ships were sunk in 1941. For those who make the trek over the Pacific, it is one of the most sought-after sights for tourists to the state, leaving a profound impact, to say the least.

But as the story so goes from that fateful day, as the attacks ensued during the early morning hours, some of the residents of Pearl Harbor sought safety and shelter in the surrounding more rural area, even as far as 20 miles away on the other side of the island. And, oddly enough, it would be a piece of land that the United States Army would purchase as an airfield training grounds for the ongoing world war. It is known as **Kualoa Ranch**, located on the eastern side of Oahu, one of the most breath-taking sites in the entire state. And as the Army gradually faded away from using its 1000 acres for training its soldiers, it has been shown in numerous Hollywood

productions because of its scenery that tends to pop on movie and television screens or even on projection screens for makeshift sermons. So, over the years even more millions of people have flocked to Kualoa Ranch because of Jurassic Park and Jumanji or even the prime-time shows of Magnum P.I. and Lost. Someday, perhaps our family will make that 15-hour plane ride, but that will not be happening anytime soon, to put it mildly. Regardless, sometimes the novel art of photographs can still unleash more than thousands of words when looking at lush valleys and mountains and rainforests and beaches all the while conserving native and endangered plant life amidst a serene ocean.

This season of Advent has a way of inviting us to consider what we believe the end is going to look like. Whether we like to think about it or not, the church will put before us during this time of year portions of Scripture that brings not just the first arrival of the Messiah, but the bodily return, front and center. And so, every early December, in a sense, we are not so subtly encouraged to ponder what is that going to look like? What do we believe heaven will be? What eternal paradise do we hope to find? Some might still cling to pearly gates and golden roads and clouds under our feet.

Maybe. I, of course, have no idea. They didn't give us any insider secrets at the seminary, for some reason. But there's this part of me that hopes, that craves, for the portion we heard from Isaiah to be it.

And I don't just want wolves living with lambs and leopards lying down with goats and calves feeding together with lions and cows grazing with bears. I want the Creation restored to its intended beauty. I want this still beautiful, still breath-taking Creation to not be taken for granted. I don't just want a new Creation in us, in humanity, I want it for the natural wonders with their own life, too. Some would say those verses in Isaiah are purely metaphorical: that it is all about us being in harmony. All well and good, as well we should, not just in the far-off distant eternity, but as much as we can right now, to be sure. But I still want it for that too. I don't want the pearly gates. I'm not a fan of golden roads. I don't need clouds beneath my feet. I hope, I crave for the Creation, God's most masterful artistry, being reworked, remagnified, just as God envisioned it all along.

Because on this second Sunday of Advent when we consider where we find peace in this world, a peace that we boldly believe we can still more than find in that Messiah who came to life for us and for the world; there's

still something to be said for a peace to be found in the Creation, too. The prophet Isaiah describes how a little child shall lead all these supposed animal or human enemies to actually live and thrive together, but I wonder if the prophet had something else in mind too. That children have a way of making sure we don't just move on past a breath-taking peace of nature that we often take for granted. A little child can lead all of us to a peace that's often right in front of us when we go out the door. And it may just be the closest we have to experiencing the peace that surpasses all understanding, when that Messiah came to life and unveiled the most breath-taking Gospel of hope and grace and love, a serenity that is not reserved for some far-off in the distant heaven, but already unleashed within us, and will never ever be taken away. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.